

# **HABITAT MONTANA**

## **REPORT TO THE 64<sup>th</sup> MONTANA LEGISLATURE**

### **MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS**



Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Photo Credit: M. Sommer.

**Wildlife Division  
JANUARY 2015**

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## OVERVIEW

This report summarizes Habitat Conservation projects completed by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) from January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2014 using HB 526 (also referred to as “Habitat Montana”) and other funding sources. Habitat Montana was originally established through legislation passed by the 1987 Montana Legislature (87-1-241 et seq. MCA). Administrative rules (ARM 12.9.511) further direct FWP to apply Habitat Montana guidelines to all of FWP’s wildlife habitat acquisition programs, where appropriate.

Habitat Montana came into existence from a need felt by the people of Montana. Montanans cherish their wildlife and outdoor opportunities. In order to keep wildlife abundant into the future, the necessities of life for wild animals need to be maintained. In other words, conservation of habitat is an important goal for Montanans to preserve their way of life.



**Whitetail Prairie Addition to Beartooth WMA. Photo Credit: C. Loecker**

Montana hunters, outdoor recreationists, and conservation organizations have long considered the Habitat Montana Program essential to their interests, and without their support this program would not exist today. Conservation organizations have often partnered with FWP to protect tracts of important habitat for their mutual conservation benefit. Partners include: The Nature Conservancy; Pheasants Forever; The National Wild Turkey Federation; Mule Deer Foundation; Trout Unlimited; Safari Club International; The Conservation Fund; The Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes; United States Forest Service; United States Bureau of Land Management; United States Fish and Wildlife Service; Bonneville Power Administration; The Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust; The Blackfoot Challenge; Montana Wildlife Federation; Northwestern Energy; PPL-MT; Butte Skyline Sportsmen’s Club; Anaconda Sportsmen; Montana Audubon; Five Valleys Land Trust; Rock Creek Land Trust; Flathead Land Trust; and a variety of other organizations and land trusts.

Habitat Montana helps the people of the State conserve wildlife habitat. It does so in a balanced fashion while often maintaining the traditional agricultural uses of the land. After more than 25 years, the program has demonstrated how wildlife and agriculture can coexist and benefit each other. The program has a committed constituency that appreciates land conservation actions that endure for generations.

Landowners have sold conservation easements to FWP for a variety of reasons including to ensure future conservation of natural and agricultural values on the ranch; to allow their heirs to be able to afford to buy the ranch; for family estate planning; to ensure a place for the public to recreate, especially for hunting; to enlarge agricultural operations; and to pay off debt.

Between January 1, 2013 and December 31, 2014, FWP secured a total of 20,141 acres through a combination of fee title acquisition and conservation easement (Tables 1 and 2). This includes 8 fee title projects totaling 3,741 acres and 6 conservation easement projects totaling 16,400 acres. These projects were completed using a variety of funding sources totaling \$11,077,750 including \$2,740,000 of HB526 (Habitat Montana) funds.

As of December 2014, FWP holds 49 Habitat Montana wildlife conservation easements covering 238,695 acres and costing approximately \$28.2 million. Fee title ownership purchased through the program totals 117,868 acres, costing \$42.9 million in Habitat Montana funds. Habitat Montana projects by area are 62% easements, 31% fee title, and 7% lease. Total FWP wildlife lands would have a different breakdown of percentages.

## **HISTORY OF HABITAT MONTANA**

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has been involved with conserving habitat for wildlife benefit since 1940. For many years there was no specific funding source to address the fundamental need to acquire, conserve, and manage important wildlife habitats. When dollars were available, land was purchased and became part of the Department's wildlife management areas.

The "Habitat Montana Program" is the result of legislation passed in 1987 (HB 526) in which portions of several big game licenses were earmarked for the protection of wildlife habitat, particularly 'important habitat that is seriously threatened' (HB526 Statement of Intent). The rules ensure that acquired interests in habitat lands are reasonably distributed around the state in accordance with the statewide habitat acquisition plan.

In the 1980s, conservationists discussed the possibility of setting aside specific funding for the Department for the purpose of purchasing important habitat on a consistent basis when key habitats became available. The 1987 Montana Legislature saw the introduction of HB 526, which would be funded by fees from hunting licenses. The debate in the legislature was between those who did not want the Department buying land and those who saw habitat as the foundation for the future. The compromise by the legislature was authority given to the Department to acquire interests in land, with the legislature directing the agency to attempt conservation easements or lease before fee title purchase. Fee title purchase was still allowed because the legislature understood the seller of land would determine which method was in his best interest.

HB 526 became reality generating about \$2.8 million per year for acquiring interests in “important habitat that is seriously threatened”. Approximately 92% of revenue for this program comes from nonresident hunting licenses.

From the very beginning, FWP tried to implement the intent of the legislation, but its success was limited. The reason was twofold: first, the Department was unfamiliar with conservation easements and needed to develop its expertise on implementing this conservation tool; and second, landowners were skeptical of easements. These two problems no longer exist.

The first year that funding was available, the Department purchased two properties in fee title, the Robb Ledford Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and an addition to the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA.

In 1989, the second year of operation, two additional WMA’s were purchased. A major effort to acquire a conservation easement on the Brewer Ranch changed to a fee title purchase at the request of the landowner. The Department assured the FWP Commission that easement terms would be placed on the Brewer property and then sold. This happened five years later.

In 1990, FWP purchased its first wildlife conservation easement (160 acres adjacent to Dome Mountain



**Robb Ledford Wildlife Management Area. Photo Credit: R. Northrup**

Wildlife Management Area). In 1992, FWP made an agreement with a landowner to enter into a five-year management agreement which both parties hoped would lead to a conservation easement, which did happen in 1998.

A major threshold was crossed in 1994 with the success of exchanging the Brewer property, with easement terms in place, for an easement on the Page/Whitham property north of Fort Peck Reservoir. Interest by the agricultural community accelerated with the involved landowner answering many questions from interested landowners. Since then, FWP has had a variety of projects to select from.

In 1989, HB720 mandated a social/economic impact analysis be completed with each acquisition. Now, with each acquisition, FWP completes the following requirements: develop a Montana Environmental Policy Act environmental assessment that includes an analysis of potential social/economic impacts; develop a Management Plan for the property; make these documents available to adjacent landowners as well as the general public; and conduct a public hearing that takes place during the public review period.

The 1991 Legislature directed FWP to review its habitat program. The Department hired two consultants, Econ, Inc. to look at FWP administrative functioning for the program, and Canyon Consulting, Inc., to evaluate public participation in the program.

In September 1992, Canyon Consulting recommended implementing a policy that defined the public benefits to be derived from the habitat program. The Commission adopted policies through the administrative rule making (ARM) process, directing FWP to provide the following public benefits (ARM 12.9.510):

- Conserve and enhance land, water, and wildlife
- Contribute to hunting and fishing opportunities
- Provide incentives for habitat conservation on private land
- Contribute to non-hunting recreation
- Protect open space and scenic areas
- Promote habitat-friendly agriculture
- Maintain the local tax base, through payments in lieu of taxes for real estate, while demonstrating that productive wildlife habitat is compatible with agriculture and other land uses.

One of Econ's main recommendations, to develop a comprehensive statewide plan, was completed in 1994, the 'Statewide Habitat Plan, an implementation of FWP Commission Habitat Montana Policy'.



In 1993, the Wildlife Division Administrator asked for a habitat mapping effort from the Regional Wildlife Managers to discern which habitats were the most at risk. The habitats defined in the Statewide Plan are 1) Montane Forest, 2) Intermountain Grassland, 3) Riparian/Wetland, 4) Shrub-Grassland, 5) Prairie Forest, and 6) Prairie Grassland. In a display of unanimity, every region identified Intermountain Grassland, Riparian/Wetland, and Shrub-Grassland as the habitats most in need of attention. Intermountain Grasslands are choice areas for residential development. Such subdivisions can disrupt winter range for wildlife as well as affect wildlife movements and migration routes. Riparian habitat comprises less than 4% of the state but is a highly productive habitat type. Many species of wildlife depend on riparian habitats in some stage of their life cycle. Riparian habitats are also heavily managed by landowners because of its productive ground. Sagebrush-grassland has diminished across the West, including in Montana. This is a habitat of special concern. Montana is a leader in sagebrush conservation in a state where half of these habitats are in private ownership.

The Goal Statement in the Statewide Habitat Plan states: “Beginning in October 1993, for the next two years, the intermountain grassland, shrub-grassland, and riparian ecosystems will be the focus of wildlife habitat acquisitions, with the objective of conserving approximately 10% of each of these ecosystems.” In October of 1995 this goal was still considered valid and was to continue until 2006. In the 2005 Legislature the sunset provision for HB526 was removed, making the program permanent. The habitat goals have remained the same and are consistent with the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy published in 2005.



**Cowell Conservation Easement. Photo Credit: M. Sullivan.**

In 1998, the FWP Commission asked for an internal audit of the conservation easements. This was divided into two sections, a review of the legal aspects of the easements, and a review of the rigor of the baseline inventory reports. Fifteen easements were chosen by the legal audit contractor, Knight, Masar and Harris, Attorneys at Law. The contractor working on baselines did likewise. The audit, delivered in 1999, showed no major problems with the easements and associated baselines. In 2000, the other 15 easements were reviewed, again with no major problems. The major author of the report, Robert Knight, came before the Commission to answer questions. He said the language and form of the easements were up

to date and there were no specific problems. There is constant discussion between the Wildlife Division, Legal Unit, and Lands Unit on the formulation of new easement language and terms to adapt to changing concerns and continued experience.

Over the program's history, FWP's work on wildlife land projects have varied. Early efforts using Habitat Montana funds focused on expanding existing wildlife management areas such as the Blackfoot-Clearwater (deer and elk winter range), Judith (elk winter range) and Ninepipe (wetlands/waterfowl and pheasant habitat) or acquiring new WMA's such as Robb/Ledford (elk winter range), Dome Mtn.(elk winter range), and Mt. Silcox (Bighorn Sheep winter range). Gradually, the focus was on conservation easements on important habitat types including big sagebrush-grassland (Brewer, South Ranch, Fluss, Cowell, Peters); riparian (Hirsch, Bice, Hart); and intermountain grassland (Maher, Bolin, Sieben Ranch, and Hirschy Ranch) as examples.

## MANAGING LAND PROJECTS

*Maintenance:* Twenty percent of the Habitat Montana revenue is used for operation and maintenance of all FWP wildlife lands. According to statute, 50% of these funds are deposited in a Habitat Trust Account. The remaining 50% and interest from the Habitat Trust Account are available for funding maintenance projects, totaling approximately \$800,000 annually in recent years. The majority of these funds are used to meet the intent of the Good Neighbor Policy (MCA 23-1-126(2) ) including fence maintenance, road maintenance, and weed control on FWP fee ownership lands. FWP funding from non-earmarked hunting license revenue, Pittman Robertson funds, and state and federal grants are also used to pay for operations and management costs of WMAs, totaling well over \$1 million that are in addition to Habitat Montana funding. Each year the Wildlife Division completes an average of 15 large maintenance and construction projects at a cost of approximately \$550,000.



**Forest Management on West Kootenai WMA. Photo Credit: R. Northrup**

The 2009 legislature passed a measure that allowed FWP to invest income from forest treatments back into forestry work on FWP lands. The Wildlife Division has since planned and implemented a number of forestry



projects on Mount Haggin, West Kootenai, Marshall Creek, Threemile, and Blackfoot Clearwater WMAs. These projects serve to enhance wildlife habitat and address fuel and forest health issues.

*Taxes:* For wildlife lands, FWP pays to the county in which the land resides “a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen” (MCA 87-1-603). For tax year 2014, FWP paid \$489,948.58 in tax payments on its wildlife lands.

*Conservation Easements:* Approximately \$25,000 of Habitat Montana funding is used to help pay for annually monitoring each conservation easement to assure easement compliance and to work with landowners on any issues that may arise. The major terms in FWP conservation easements involve both *protection* and *management* of the Land.

- **Protection:** This refers to easement terms such as no subdivision and building limitations on the land. Normal farming practices continue, but no new fields are broken. No commercial activities other than those appropriate to agricultural practices. Mining practices must not negatively impact conservation values of the land.
- **Management:** This refers to day-to-day practices agreed to in a management plan that assure vegetation, soils, and other habitat features are conserved as a part of ongoing agricultural activities, and recreation is maintained at an appropriate level to serve the public good while avoiding negative impacts. Management often includes developing and implementing livestock grazing systems, access plans for the recreating public, and habitat restoration. Improvements necessary for implementing management plans are often paid for in part using Habitat Montana funds. Once improvements are in place, the ongoing need associated with managing conservation easements is monitoring, maintaining regular communication with cooperators, updating management plans as needed, working with and informing new landowners of easement terms, and working on periodic compliance issues.



**Raundal Coulee Conservation Easement. Photo Credit: G. Taylor.**

## 2013-2014 WILDLIFE LAND PROJECTS – HABITAT MONTANA AND OTHER FUNDING SOURCES

The following section summarizes all land acquisition projects, conservation easements and fee title, which were completed for wildlife conservation during calendar years 2013 and 2014. The funding sources vary among projects, of which some do not include Habitat Montana funding (Tables 1 and 2). Four projects were scheduled for completion by the end of December 2014, which are listed at the end of each Table. A more detailed summary of each land project follows in the order listed in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1. Conservation easements acquired through the Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Wildlife Division during calendar years 2013 and 2014. One project at the end of this table is scheduled to be completed by the end of December 2014.**

DATE OF TRANSACTION	SITE NAME	TYPE	COST	FUNDING SOURCE	ACRES
May 24, 2013	Douglas Creek CE	WCE	\$472,288	FOREST LEGACY - \$472,288 LANDOWNER DONATION - \$204,712	1,360.00
May 24, 2013	Murray Creek CE	WCE	\$601,347	FOREST LEGACY - \$601,347 LANDOWNER DONATION - \$260,653	1,437.20
May 24, 2013	Murray Douglas CE	WCE	\$1,826,365	FOREST LEGACY - \$1,826,365 LANDOWNER DONATION - \$791,635	7,930.16
February 26, 2014	Raundal Coulee CE	WCE	\$900,000	HABITAT MONTANA - \$900,000	2,595.76
November 13, 2014	Buffalo Coulee CE	WCE	\$450,000	HABITAT MONTANA - \$450,000	2,778.45
Scheduled to close by December 31, 2014	Pheasant Bend CE	WCE	\$280,000	HABITAT MONTANA - \$280,000	298.00

\*WCE = Wildlife Conservation Easement

**Table 2. Fee title land acquisitions completed through the Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Wildlife Division during calendar years 2013 and 2014. Three projects at the end of this table are scheduled to be completed by the end of December 2014.**

DATE OF TRANSACTION	SITE NAME	TYPE*	COST	FUNDING SOURCE	ACRES
November 12, 2013	Elk Island WMA Addition	WMA	\$91,250	HABITAT MONTANA - \$91,250	39.99
December 10, 2013	Red Hill Road East Fork Access	AFLW	\$50,000	LANDOWNER DONATION - \$140,000 HOME TO HUNT PROGRAM - \$50,000	40.00
December 19, 2013	Big Lake WMA Addition	WMA	\$2,500	MIGRATORY BIRD LICENSE HABITAT PROGRAM - \$2,500	4.10
February 28, 2014	North Shore Flathead Lake WMA Addition	WMA	\$1,610,000	BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION - \$1,610,000 LANDOWNER DONATION - \$120,000	189.30
April 30, 2014	Blackleaf WMA Addition	WMA	\$345,000	USFWS - GRIZZLY BEAR HABITAT GRANT - \$345,000 LANDOWNER DONATION - \$230,000	320.00
November 14, 2014	Garrity Mountain WMA Addition	WMA	\$1,380,000	NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE PROGRAM - \$1,280,000 HABITAT MONTANA - \$50,000 FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION TRUST - \$50,000	640.00
Scheduled to close by December 31, 2014	Beartooth WMA Addition	WMA	\$4,075,000	USFWS PITTMAN ROBERTSON - \$3,056,250 HABITAT MONTANA - \$1,018,750	2,840.00
Scheduled to close by December 31, 2014	Fish Creek WMA Addition	WMA	\$350,000	USFWS PITTMAN ROBERTSON - \$224,000 THOMPSON FALLS MITIGATION FUND - \$120,000 TROUT UNLIMITED - \$6,000	148.00
Scheduled to close by December 31, 2014	Big Lake WMA Addition	WMA	\$24,000	MIGRATORY BIRD LICENSE HABITAT PROGRAM - \$24,000	160.00

\*WMA = Wildlife Management Area; AFLW = Affiliated Lands Wildlife

## **Douglas Creek, Murray Creek, and Murray Douglas Conservation Easements**

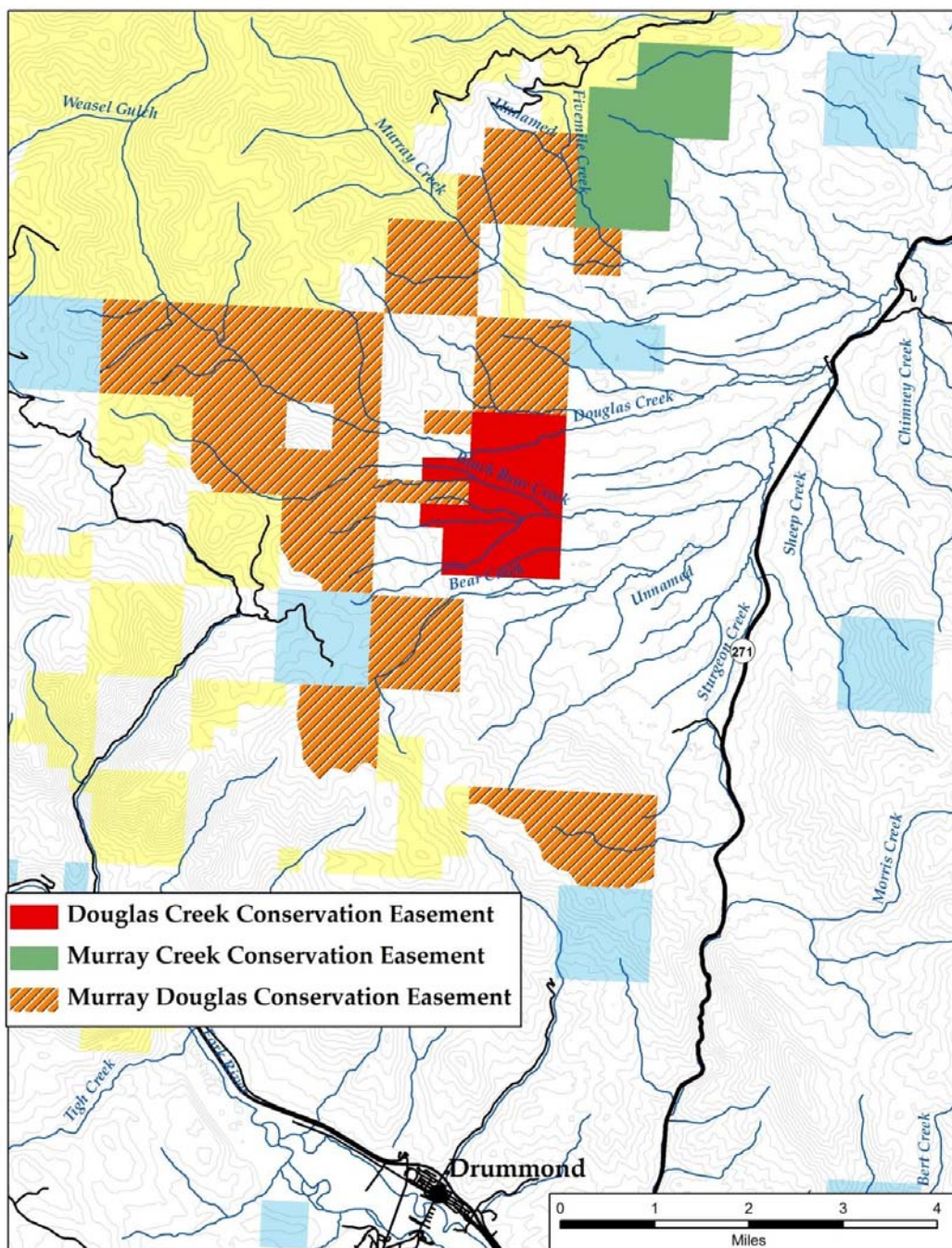
**Purpose:** These conservation easements, totaling 10,727 acres, conserve important fish and wildlife habitat by preventing subdivision, residential development, and other forms of habitat loss. Habitat includes mule deer and elk summer and transitional fall range, occupied grizzly bear habitat, and connectivity habitat for Canada lynx. Through these easements, the area will continue to provide popular hunting opportunities for deer, elk, forest grouse, mountain lions, moose, black bears, and wolves. Traditional uses of the land, including livestock grazing and timber management, will continue under terms of the easements.

**Habitat:** Coniferous Forest and Riparian



**Figure 1. Overview of Douglas Creek, Murray Creek, and Murray Douglas Conservation Easements, totaling 10,727 acres, located approximately 7 miles north of Drummond, Powell County. Photo Credit: J. Kolbe.**





**Figure 2. Douglas Creek, Murray Creek, and Murray Douglas Conservation Easements. Yellow lands are Bureau of Land Management, Blue lands are DNRC.**



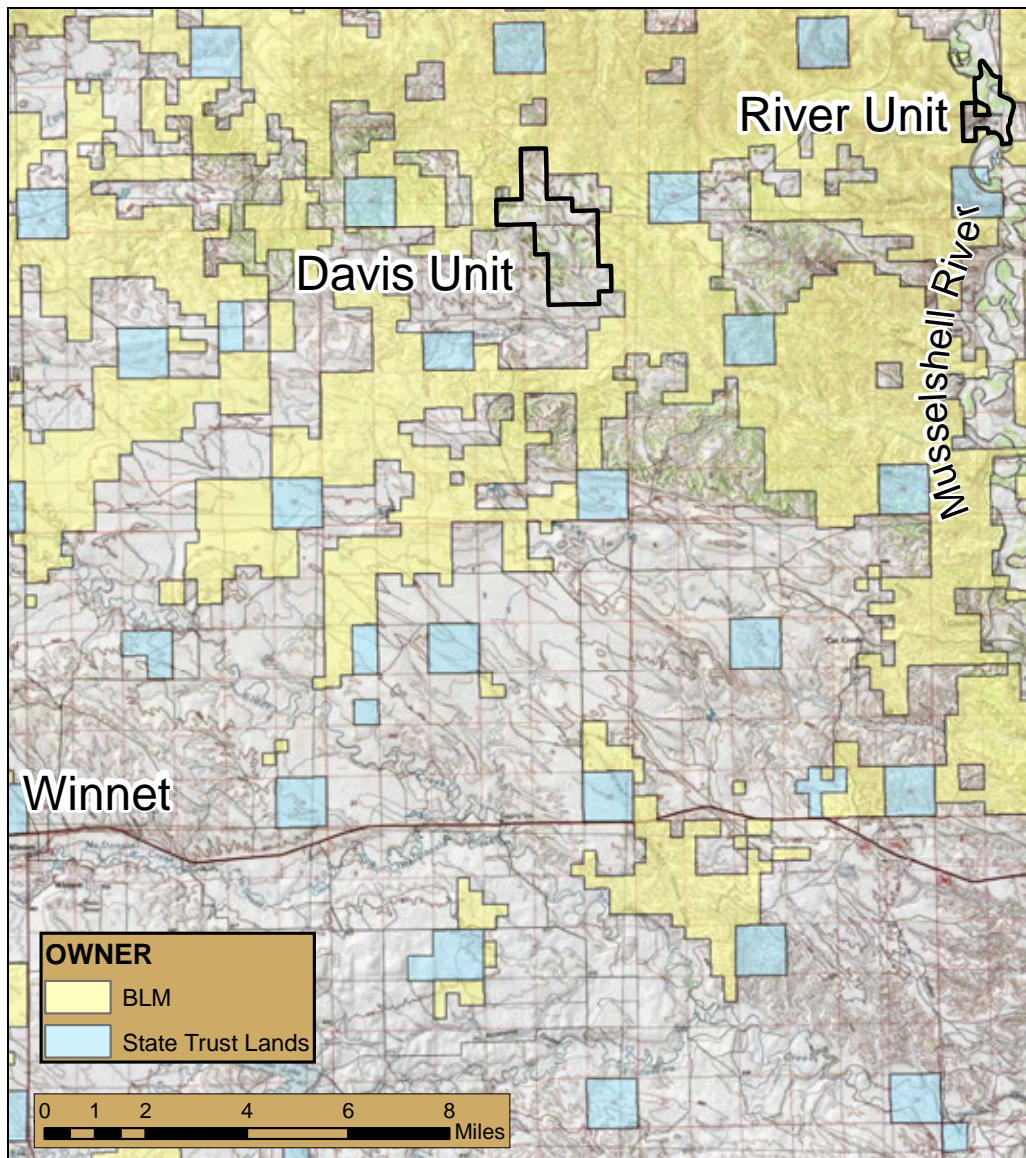
## **Raundal Coulee Conservation Easement**

**Purpose:** This conservation easement conserves a unique mix of year-round habitats for elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, wild turkey, sharp-tailed grouse, and a variety of small mammals and bird species. The property includes a mix of Musselshell bottoms, breaks, and uplands comprising mixed grass prairie, ponderosa forest, and cropland. The easement protects against land use changes that would negatively impact wildlife habitat values while supporting continued use of the land for livestock, hay, and crop production. Hunting and other forms of public recreation are provided for in perpetuity.

**Habitat:** Plains Ponderosa Forest, Sagebrush Grassland, Mixed Grass Prairie, and Riparian



**Figure 3. Raundal Coulee Conservation Easement, located approximately 15 miles northeast of Winnet, Petroleum County. Photo Credit: G. Taylor.**



**Figure 4. Raundal Coulee Conservation Easement, made up of two units, totaling 2,595.76 acres.**

## **Buffalo Coulee Conservation Easement**

**Purpose:** This project involves conserving and restoring a mix of sagebrush grasslands, riparian, and cottonwood bottoms along the Milk River, totaling 2,825 acres. The property supports white-tailed and mule deer, sharp-tailed grouse, Merriam's turkeys, a variety of furbearers, and nongame species. One of the parcels provides critical wintering habitat for pronghorn antelope and a north-south linkage for migrating sage-grouse. The conservation easement retains traditional haying, grazing, and farming practices while

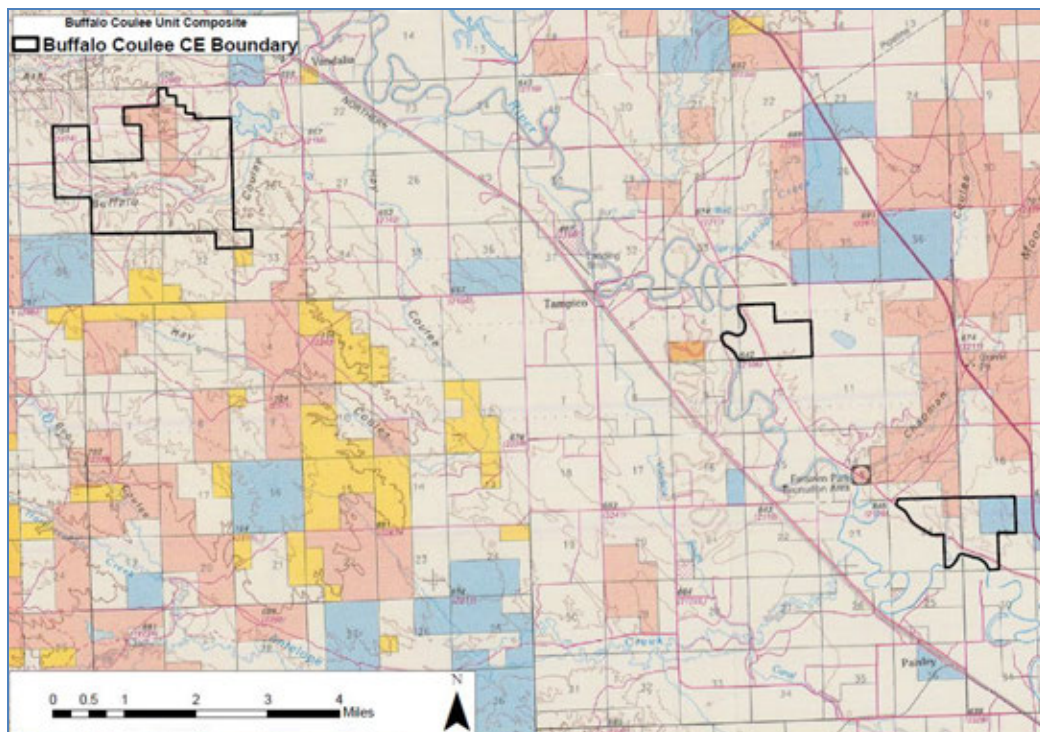


protecting against conversion of habitat to other uses. The property will continue to provide hunting, fishing, and other public recreation in perpetuity.

**Habitat:** Sagebrush Grasslands, Riparian



**Figure 5. Buffalo Coulee Conservation Easement, located in the vicinity of Vandalia and Tampico, Valley County. Photo Credit: K. Johnson.**



**Figure 6. Buffalo Coulee Conservation Easement, totaling 2,778.45 acres.**

## **Pheasant Bend Conservation Easement**

(This project is scheduled to close by the end of December 2014)

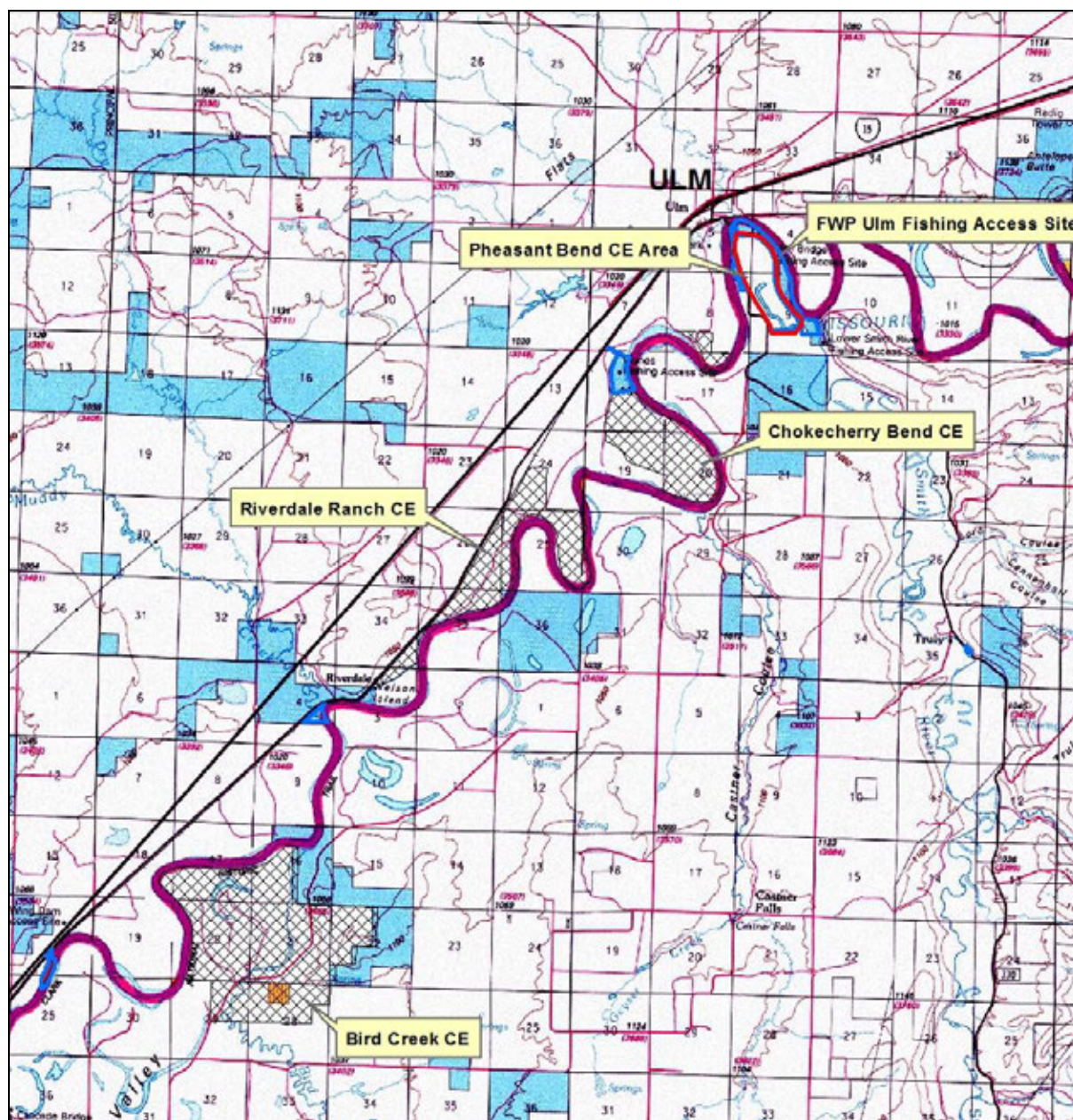
This easement is one of a number of conservation easement projects completed by FWP along the Missouri River between Ulm and Cascade. The Missouri River bottom land, including cottonwood galleries, shrub grasslands, riverine and backwater wetlands, irrigated hay fields, and cropland make for a productive array of intermingled habitats, used by white-tailed deer, turkeys, pheasants, waterfowl, song birds, small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles. The Pheasant Bend Conservation Easement adds to a complex of conserved lands that provide public access for hunting and other compatible recreation while continuing to support traditional agricultural values.

**Habitat:** Riparian and Cropland



**Figure 7. Pheasant Bend Conservation Easement, immediately southeast of Ulm, Cascade County. Photo Credit: C. Loecker.**





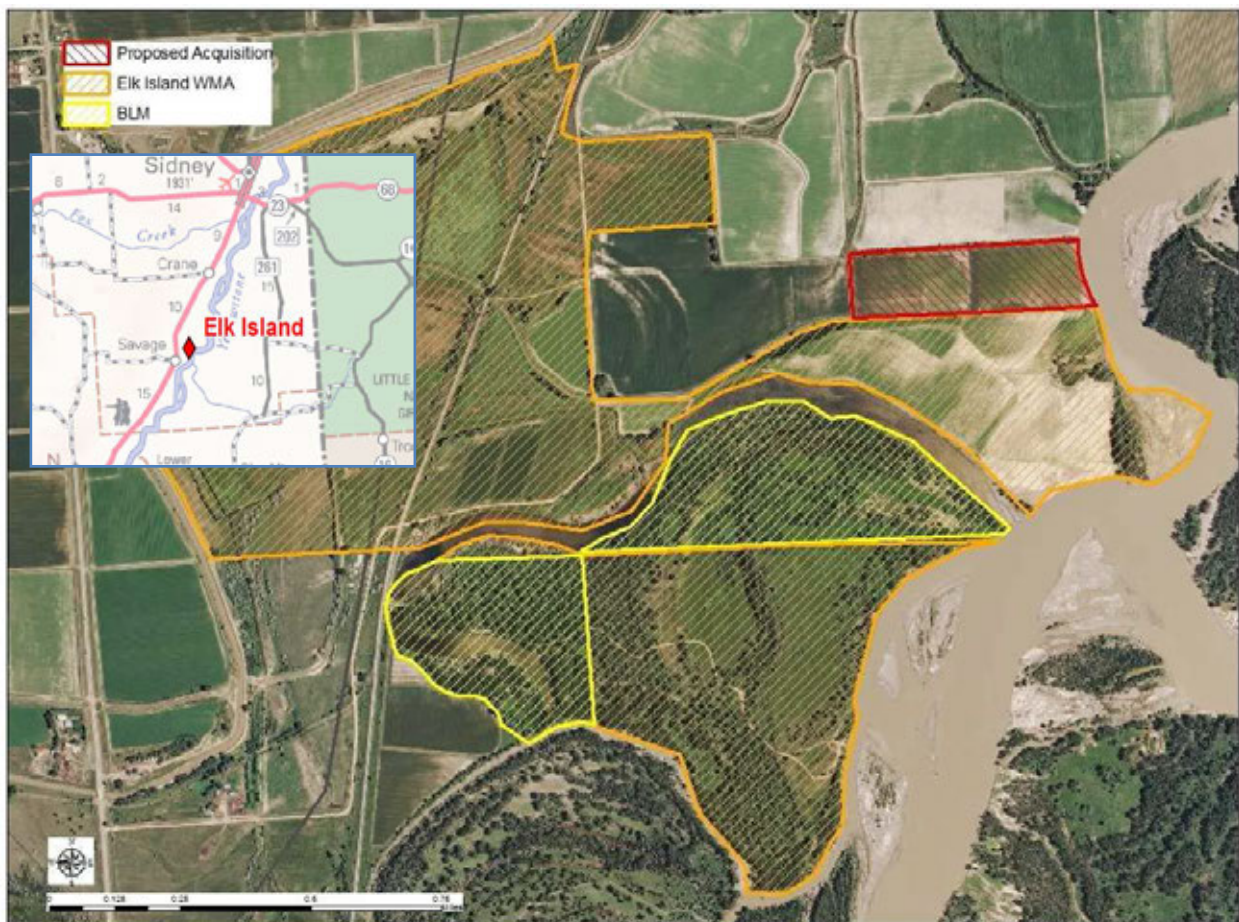
**Figure 8. Pheasant Bend CE, in association with other FWP Conservation Easement holdings and the Ulm Fishing Access Site.**



## Addition to Elk Island WMA

**Purpose:** Elk Island Wildlife Management Area, located about 20 miles south of Sidney, provides a highly productive mix of Yellowstone River bottomland, including cottonwood galleries, nesting cover, and croplands that are leased to local producers. This 40-acre addition to the WMA, which is made up entirely of cropland, will be managed to enhance the WMA's productivity by expanding nesting cover and wildlife food plots, primarily benefiting pheasants, wild turkeys, and white-tailed deer.

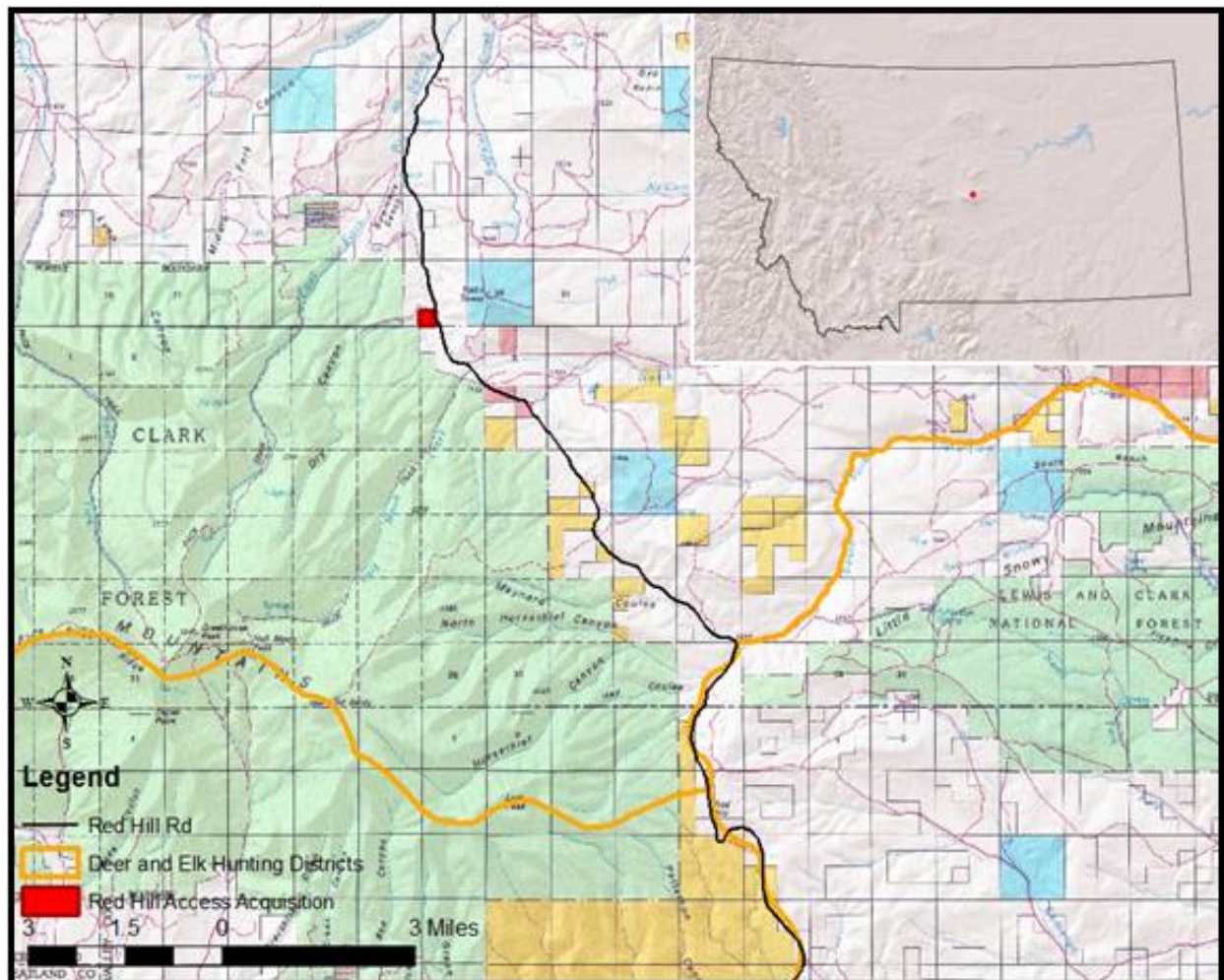
**Habitat:** Cropland and Restored Grassland



**Figure 9. Overview of the addition (red hatched) to Elk Island WMA, totaling 39.99 acres.**

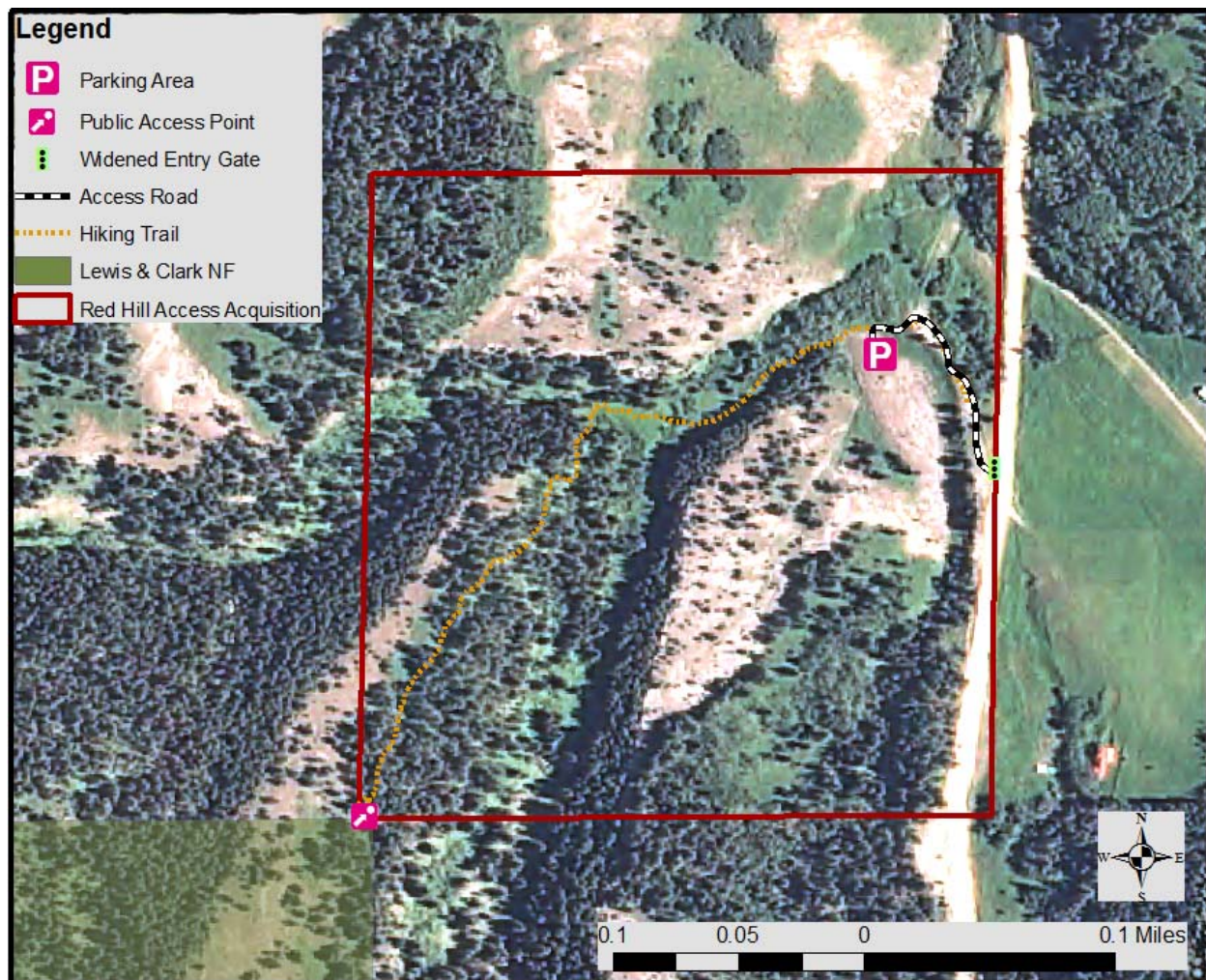
## Red Hill Access

**Purpose:** This 40-acre property was funded by FWP's Home to Hunt program in partnership with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. A 30-foot portion of the parcel boundary abuts Lewis and Clark National Forest Land, providing critical public access to this portion of the Big Snowy Mountains. This public access point will expand opportunities for year round recreation and will help in managing the elk herd size in the Snowy Elk Management Unit, which has been over objective.



**Figure 10.** Location of Red Hill Access acquisition, approximately 20 miles south of Lewistown, Fergus County.





**Figure 11. Layout of Red Hill Access acquisition.** The parcel is surrounded by private lands, except for the public road and a 30-foot overlap with Lewis and Clark National Forest.

### Additions to Big Lake Wildlife Management Area

**Purpose:** The Big Lake Wildlife Management Area was originally purchased as a mitigation project to offset the impacts of waterfowl collision losses associated with a 500 KV transmission line near Lake Broadview. The WMA is managed for waterfowl nesting and migration staging habitat. The two additions to the WMA, totaling 164 acres, were purchased to help establish a manageable and publicly accessible block of land surrounding Big Lake. The smaller parcel was an abandoned railroad corridor that impeded access to the northeast portion of the WMA. The 160-acre parcel was scheduled for closing by the

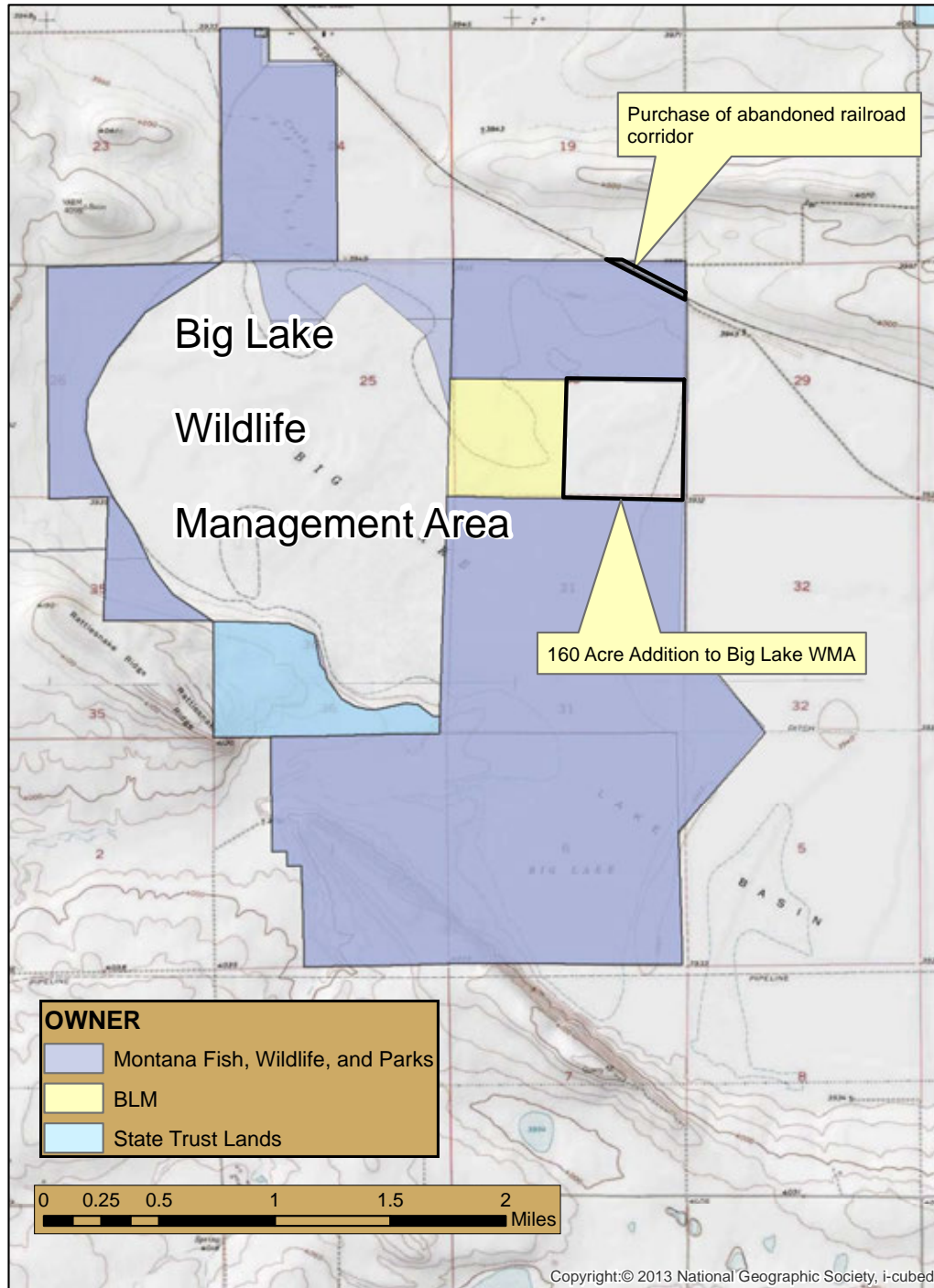
end of December 2014. Most of this larger parcel is within the lake basin and will allow FWP to manage the basin and uplands surrounding the entire lake.

**Habitat:** Wetland and Mixed-Grass Prairie



**Figure 12. Big Lake Wildlife Management Area, Stillwater County. Photo Credit: J. Hansen.**





**Figure 13. Additions to Big Lake Wildlife Management Area, 2 miles west of Molt, 24 miles northwest of Billings.**



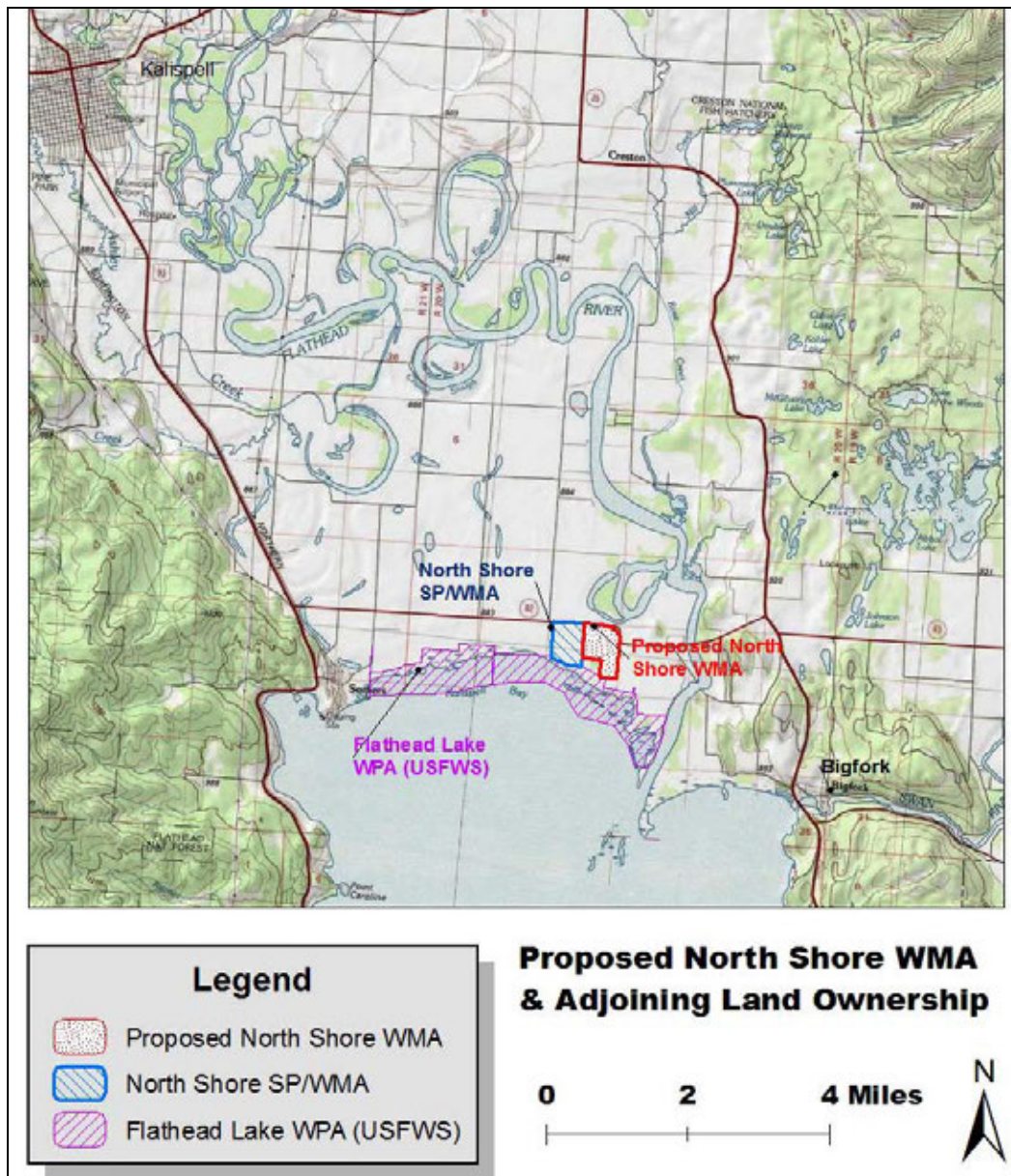
## North Shore Wildlife Management Area

**Purpose:** The north shore of Flathead Lake and adjacent croplands provides important stopover habitat to thousands of migrating waterfowl, including tundra and trumpeter swans, Canada geese, northern pintails, mallards, and American wigeon. Flooded croplands on the WMA provide high quality forage for supporting spring breeding and fall migration. Through restoration activities, the WMA will also provide seasonal wetlands, nesting cover, and shrub habitats for pheasants, deer, breeding songbirds, and many species of nongame wildlife. Given its proximity to Kalispell and adjacent lands dedicated to recreation and wildlife, the area will provide for substantial use by hunters, bird watchers, and other recreationists.

**Habitat:** Wetland, Cropland, and Restored Shrubs and Grassland



**Figure 14. Overview of North Shore WMA, Flathead County. Photo Credit: J. Vore.**



**Figure 15. Overview of North Shore Wildlife Management Area and adjacent North Shore State Park and Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area (administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service), 9 miles southeast of Kalispell.**

### **Addition to Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area**

**Purpose:** The Blackleaf WMA provides foothill habitat for grizzly bear, wintering elk and mule deer. The addition includes a mix of aspen, wetlands, and shrubland habitat. Mule deer, elk, sharp-tailed grouse, black bear, and waterfowl are commonly hunted in the area. This addition will help maintain the integrity of the WMA. Most remaining private lands

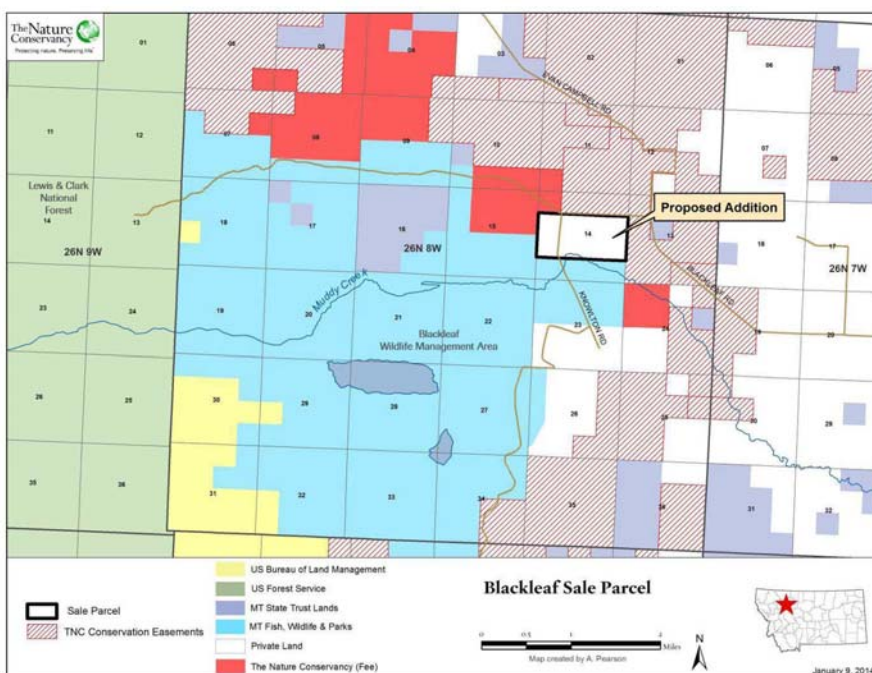


surrounding the WMA are conserved through conservation easement or ownership by conservation buyers (Figure 17).

**Habitat:** Riparian, Wetland, Aspen Forest, Bunchgrass Prairie



**Figure 16. Overview of the addition to Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area, Teton County. Photo Credit: R. Rauscher.**



**Figure 17. Addition to Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area, 22 miles northwest of Choteau.**

## **Addition to Garrity Wildlife Management Area**

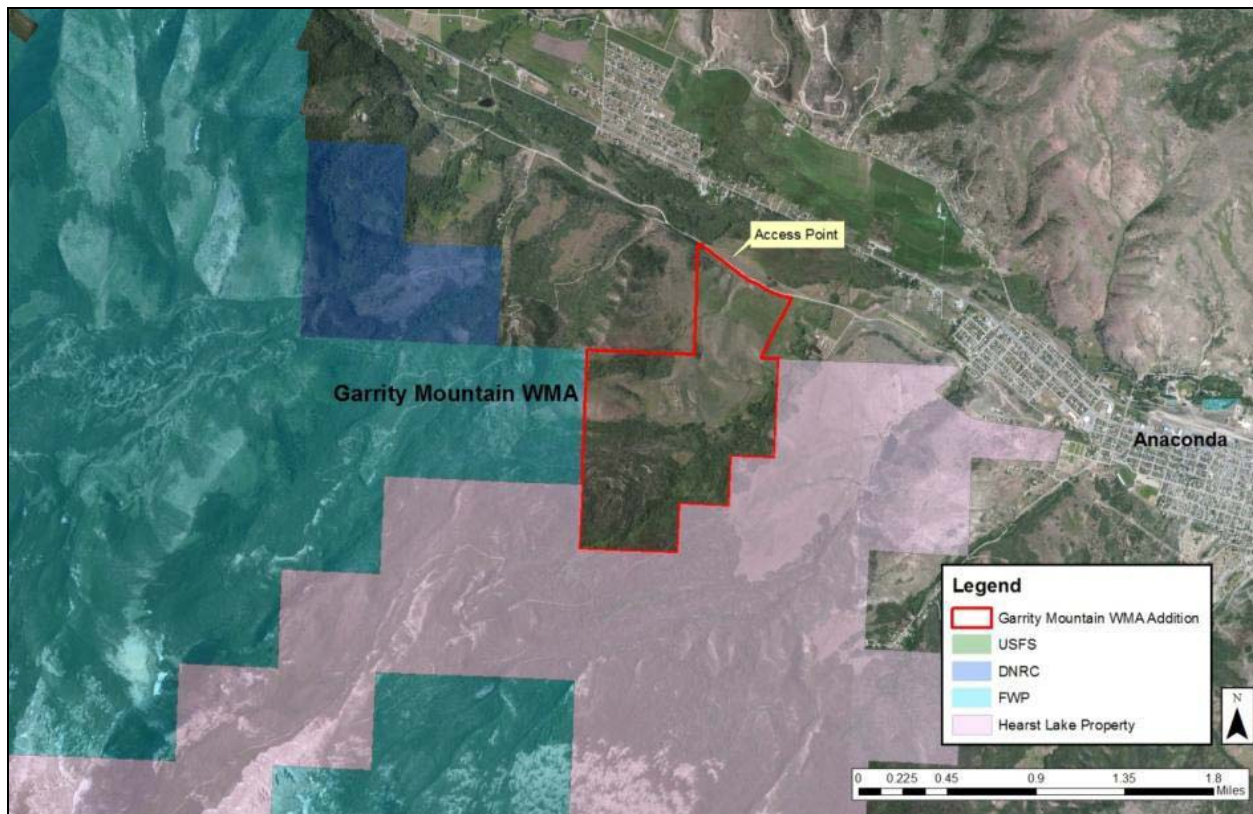
**Purpose:** Garrity Mountain WMA provides critical winter and spring habitat for elk while also supporting other big game species and 24 species of concern or potential concern. The 640-acre addition to the WMA also comprises critical winter and spring elk habitats. The addition supports large stands of aspen and riparian wetland habitats that are beneficial to most big game species and a wide variety of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. This addition will allow FWP to manage these lands specifically for their high wildlife habitat values while also providing hunting and other compatible recreation.

**Habitat:** Bunchgrass Prairie, Aspen, Riparian, Coniferous Forest



**Figure 18. The addition to Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Note extensive aspen stands. Photo Credit: M. Sommer.**





**Figure 19. Addition to Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area, approximately 1 mile west of Anaconda.**

### **Whitetail Prairie Addition to Beartooth Wildlife Management Area**

(This project is scheduled to close by the end of December 2014)

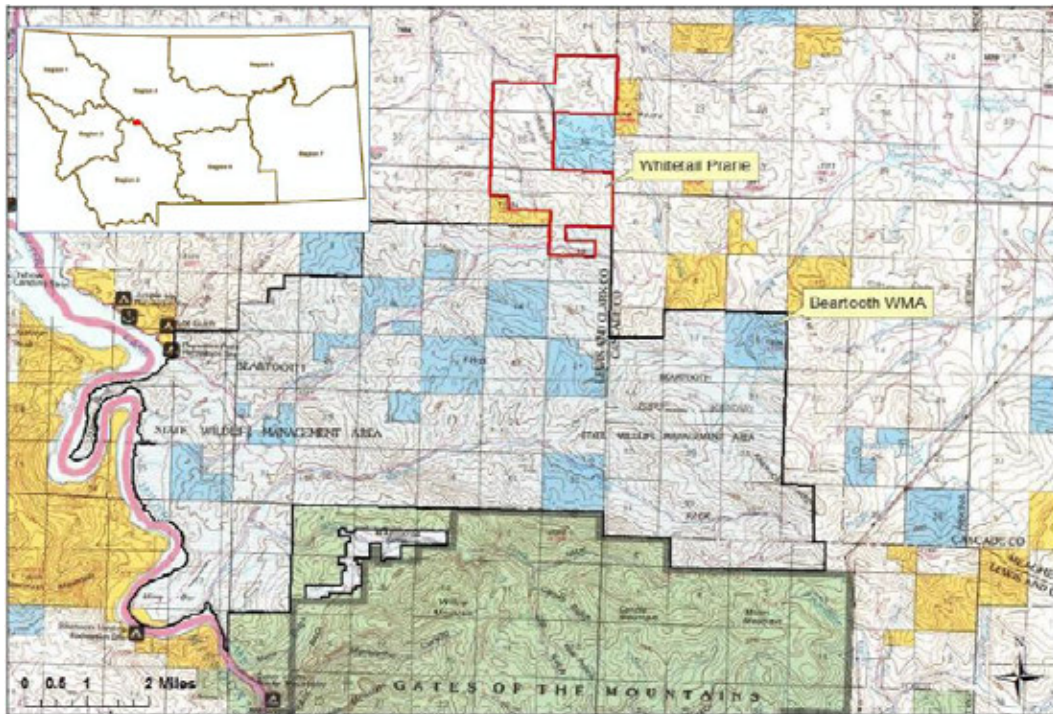
**Purpose:** The Beartooth Wildlife Management Area provides winter and year round habitat for a variety of wildlife, but in particular supports approximately 1,500 wintering elk. The Whitetail Prairie addition to the WMA, is a continuation of the elk winter range and year-round habitat for elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, black bear, mountain lion, wolf, furbearers, and mountain grouse as well as a mountain stream habitats that support westslope cutthroat trout. This addition will provide hunting and other recreational opportunities and includes access to 880 acres of adjacent state and federal lands.

**Habitat:** Intermountain Bunchgrass Prairie/Shrublands, Riparian, Stream





**Figure 20. Habitats associated with the Whitetail Addition to Beartooth WMA, Lewis and Clark County. Photo Credit: C. Loecker.**



**Figure 21. Whitetail Prairie Addition to Beartooth Wildlife Management Area, approximately 28 miles northeast of Helena.**



## **Addition to Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area**

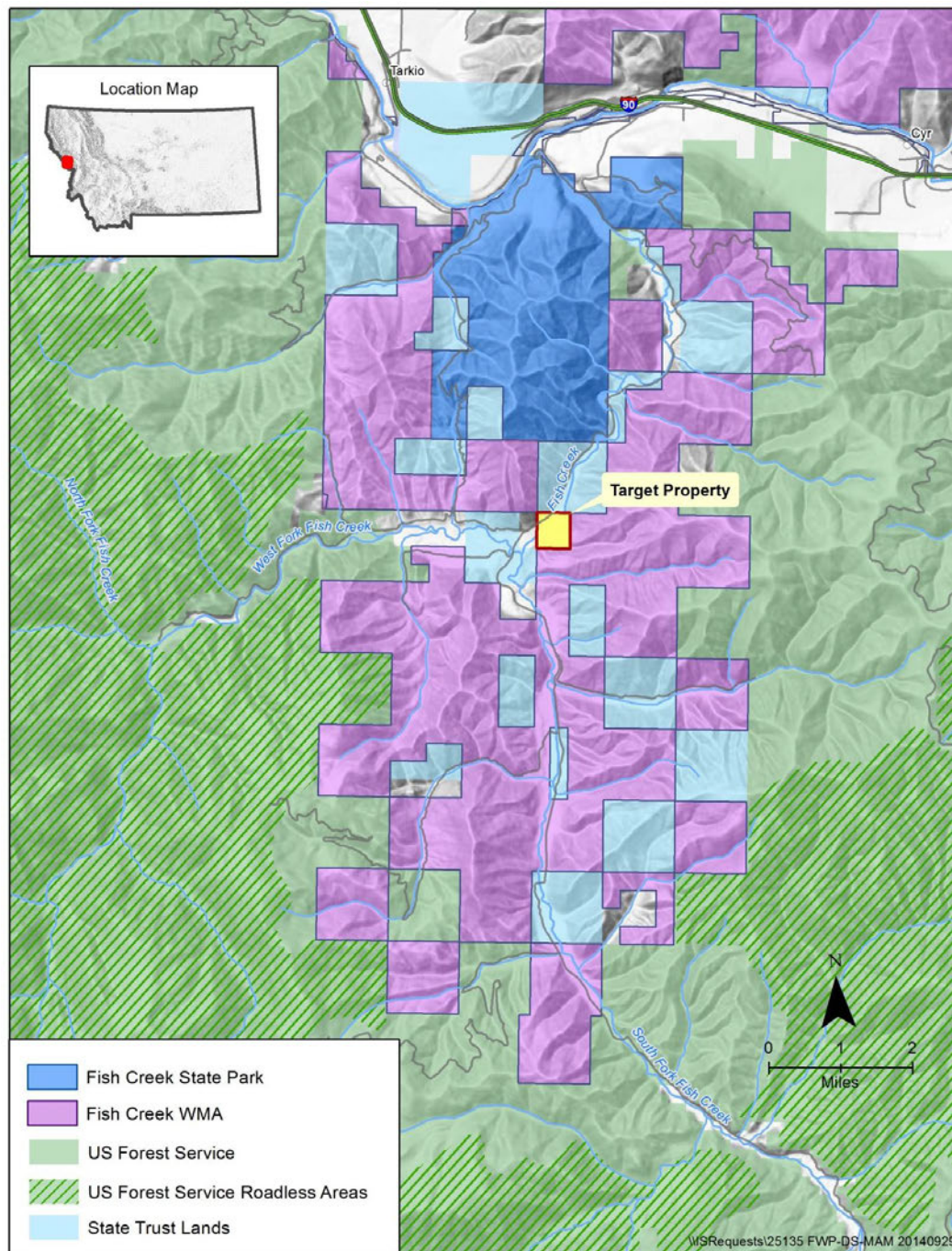
(This project is scheduled to close by the end of December 2014)

**Purpose:** The Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area provides a big game corridor, wintering habitats, extensive riparian habitat, and a bull trout fishery. This addition to the WMA was a private inholding on Fish Creek, an important spawning stream for Bull Trout and part of a riparian complex that extends over much of the WMA. This property had a high likelihood of residential/recreational development, which would have impacted the WMAs wildlife and public recreation values.

**Habitat:** Riparian, Shrubland, Coniferous Forest



**Figure 22. Elk on the addition to Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area, Mineral County. Photo Credit: V. Edwards.**



**Figure 23. Addition to Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area, 30 miles west of Missoula.**